

VZCZCXRO7253  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHPW  
DE RUEHBUL #1148/01 1260252  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 060252Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8746  
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES PRIORITY 0031

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 001148

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: UNDERSTANDING ELECTORAL SAFEGUARDS

REF: KABUL 1140

¶1. (SBU) As candidate registration nears a close, and political campaigns begin, questions about irregularities in the voter registration process are eating away at public confidence. Anecdotal reports raise concerns about female participation and fraud. If it persists, a perception of fraud among Afghans and the international community poses a greater threat to the legitimacy of the results than the fraud is likely to have on the vote tally. The Independent Election Commission (IEC), the UN, the international community, and Afghan government institutions are implementing significant electoral safeguards (ref A) to protect the actual results, and now must address public confidence in them.

¶2. (SBU) During the voter registration period, the following types of fraud and procedural flaws were reported, in descending frequency: registration of voters under 18; multiple registrations; distribution of blank registration forms; and issuance of cards intended for women to their husbands or male relatives. The observed and reported registration fraud in itself will have little or no impact on the results because the safeguards will minimize fraudulent voting.

#### HOW AFGHANS WILL VOTE

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¶3. (U) At 7AM on August 20, polling will begin for the presidential and provincial council elections at the roughly 6,950 polling centers hosting approximately 25,000 polling stations. Each polling station can accommodate up to 600 voters on election day. Outside the polling center, a site controller will check each voter registration card and individual's fingers to confirm that each arrival has not yet voted. Once confirmed, the voter will move to another IEC official, who will check that the card matches with the individual, ink the voter's finger, punch the card with a triangular hole to prevent reuse in this election, and record the card number on the list of voters.

¶4. (U) A ballot issuer will present the voter with two ballots; one presidential and one provincial council. If voting outside the province named on the voter's registration card, the voter will receive only the presidential ballot. To differentiate, one ballot is green and one is yellow and each race is associated with a different symbol. The voter will enter the polling station, vote, fold the ballot in half to hide the vote, and exit the booth. The ballot box controller will stamp the ballot and check that each voter has only one ballot per race. The voter then places the ballot into the appropriate ballot box. Once finished, the voter must leave the polling center.

#### ONE AFGHAN, ONE VOTE

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¶5. (U) The key safeguards against multiple voting - the

fraud most Afghan critics raise - are the integrity of polling center staff and the use of indelible ink. The IEC knows the importance of quality indelible ink and has engaged with UNDP to ensure the procurement meets the highest standards. IEC staff will also perform quality control checks on the ink in voting center kits to ensure it matches the procurement order and quality standards.

¶6. (SBU) For a voter to use multiple cards as a tool to cast multiple votes, as occurred in 2005, polling center staff must consciously participate in a conspiracy to allow multiple voting. The division of labor among polling center staff helps protect against this. The presence of candidate agents, party agents and domestic observers in the polling centers will also deter multiple voting.

¶7. (SBU) Article four of the Afghan electoral law stipulates that each voter shall have only one vote and is prohibited from voting on the behalf of another voter. Public debates raise that men may try to assert their political will on female relatives by engaging in illegal proxy voting. However, proxy voting for women faces the same obstacles of multiple voting. The integrity of the polling center officials and the observers and agents present in the polling center will prevent a man who has already voted from voting for female relatives. Voter registration cards list the holder's gender. A man attempting to vote with a woman's card - even if he has not yet voted - should be prevented from receiving a ballot when the polling official notes the discrepancy. Only a stand-in female, otherwise ineligible to vote could function as a proxy without detection.

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#### NO FUDGE IN THE RESULTS

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¶8. (SBU) Manipulating results will be difficult, given the IEC's decision to count votes at polling stations, providing detailed results data from the field. Ballots are numbered and the IEC will track them throughout the voting process. At the end of polling, officials will seal ballot boxes. When counting begins, the polling station manager will break the ballot box seals and remove the ballots; presidential counts will occur first.

¶9. (SBU) Officials will reconcile the number of ballots in the box with the total ballots handed out at the polling station - the number of listed voter registration cards should match. Counters will tally votes and post results in the polling station, as well as provide them to observers and agents and securing a copy in the ballot box with the tallied ballots. The manager will then reseal the ballot box and place the original tally form in a tamper evident, numbered bag for transfer to the national tally center in Kabul. The polling station manager and security forces will accompany the sealed ballot box to the provincial capital. No official should have access to more than 600 votes, should the safeguards fail. The IEC will be able to detect substantial use of fraudulent voter registration cards when the voting lists arrive in Kabul.

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